

Legislative Commerce Committee

I'd like to start off by saying thank you, for listening to what I have to say. This is a very important matter, not only for me, but for my school bus driving peers as well. I'd like to discuss unemployment benefits for private school bus drivers. Currently the guidelines state that, any school bus driver working for a private company, not a school district, are ineligible for benefits. It also states, if there is reasonable assurance of employment during the next school year, you are ineligible for benefits. This was created at a time when most school districts ran their own school buses. Since school districts are ran by the state, the system allowed for drivers, as well as teachers and administration, to be paid during summer break and other down times. This is still the practice by districts who run their own buses. School districts only use buses for school related activities. That is why driving for a district is a seasonal, part time job.

School bus drivers for private companies rely on school districts for a majority of their business. But it's not solely based on school schedules or activities. Private companies charter out to Scouting organizations, college groups, bar runs, wedding parties, sporting events, church groups, social clubs, community groups and so on. Pretty much you name an event and they could use a bus. Private companies offer charters because they are in business to make money of course and the company I work for definitely makes money. This means they run as many buses as possible as often as they can. There is however times when everyone is not able to work. The main time being the summer months. Without school in service, the workforce is looking to those few charter trips to keep busy and paid. Since the pickings are slim during the summer and not everyone can get a charter, they try to get unemployment, which we all know is essentially unattainable.

Some employees don't care because to them, this is a supplemental income. They are retirees, college students, veterans, or otherwise don't desire the benefits of a full time job. But for those that bus driving their primary source of income, it's necessary to work and get paid as much as possible to make a living. People that drive school buses are a dedicated group of individuals. They love their job, they love working with people and they love the fact they can be relied on to get someone where they need to go safely. Making it possible for school bus drivers to obtain unemployment benefits would help out everyone, not just that single employee. Many

school bus drivers look to government assistance because it just becomes too much to keep up with bills. With unemployment benefits that wouldn't be necessary. So someone in more need could use that assistance. Many school bus drivers quit, or find other employment. This creates an unsteady work environment and causes a lack of workplace comradery and morale. Mainly it hurts the passengers who know and rely on the dedicated drivers that get them where they need to be. School buses can be a very volatile place without stability. Changing drivers frequently due to a lack of interest in a very niche job can effect the riders, other classmates, home life, family and friends. It takes a special person to drive a school bus, it's definitely not for everyone. Many school bus drivers become so overwhelmed they suffer mentally and physically. This in turn causes stress with coworkers, passengers, family and friends.

Something so simple, that's already in place, could change so much for so many people. School bus drivers are a proud people. They don't want a handout, they just would like a helping hand when needed to get them through a rough patch. Unemployment claims can last for months, that's not what this is about, actually just the opposite. Considering on average, a school bus driver looking to obtain unemployment benefits, would only need them for a month or two. Since there are drivers who work during the summer, either summer school or charter trips, the windows would be small to obtain benefits. None really longer than a couple of months. From what I've seen and had to deal with personally, the school year is catching up with the lost summer months. Just when you get everything caught up, it's summer again. People don't want to leave a job they love, so they stick it out and make it work.

Unemployment benefits are in place for people who are laid off for temporary help to keep them afloat until they get back to work. Taxes are paid into a fund to make this available to those who need it. Why are school bus drivers exclusively singled out and excluded from benefits that they rightfully deserve. Other private companies that are considered seasonal or part time qualify. Charter buses, construction and other seasonal or part time jobs that are ran by private companies have employees who collect unemployment benefits. School bus drivers that work for private companies deserve what other people get. There is no difference, a seasonal job is a seasonal job. Charter bus drivers can get unemployment benefits because they have a different type of bus, but do the same type of work as school bus companies. Construction workers are very seasonal and based on weather, the economy and lack of work, which is just

like school bus companies. The unemployment system should not be a pick and choose who gets benefits and who doesn't type of system. It should be available for workers who are unable to work through no fault of their own for a reasonable length of time.

I don't know any of my school bus driving peers that want to abuse the system or get something they don't deserve. The system itself is always funded, the money is there. As long as there are employers and employees, there will always be money in the system. That is why it is there, to be used, not stockpiled money. Thousands of Kansans have the right to these unemployment benefits. The time to change things is now. Every year or so this is brought up and somehow swept to the side. School bus drivers are a vital part of society as a whole. Good school bus drivers are hard to find and maintain because of pay and benefits. The people that stick with this job year after year love it and are here for a reason. The main reason is the importance of being there for the kids. Kids need us, we need you. Please help us by changing the guidelines for unemployment benefits. Once again, thank you for listening and I truly hope you consider what's best for everyone.

Jimmy Lee Rose

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